

THE HOFMANN REPORT

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Since its inception in 1988, The Albert Hofmann Foundation has been presided over by Robert Zanger, Michael Gilbert, and Ron Bretin. Each has seen the Foundation through changing fortunes and has guided it to its current presence on the World Wide Web. It is now my turn to work with our Chairman of the Board, Dr. Oscar Janiger, our Secretary, Dr. John Beresford, and our Treasurer and Website Editor, Myron Stolaroff to increase our presence in cyberspace and continue informing the readers of the MAPS Bulletin as to the activities of the Foundation.

I thank Ron Bretin for all his time and effort as President and Michael Gilbert for his recent attention to our board. I hope to do as well and bring my business experience to the tasks at hand.

Kathy Janiger, President

STANISLAV GROF, M.D. ADVISOR TO THE ALBERT HOFMANN FOUNDATION

We are pleased in this report to introduce another of our outstanding advisors, Stanislav Grof. Stan has probably done the most research of psychedelic therapy of anyone in the world, and is generally viewed as the world's top expert in this field. He has also been the clearest, most informed speaker in defining the true nature and value of psychedelic experiences, and the basis for their widespread misunderstanding. In addition, he is a key contributor and supporter to the founding of the Transpersonal branch of psychology. Ken Wilber, whom I personally think has one of the greatest minds on the planet, and despite some personal differences with Stan, had this to say: "Stan Grof is arguably the world's greatest living psychologist. He is certainly a pioneer in every sense of the word and one of the most comprehensive psychological thinkers of our era." (Wilber, K. 1996. Stan Grof and Perinatal Redux. *Revision*, Fall 1996, Vol. 19, No. 2, page 16.)

A brief review of his history reveals his qualifications as an outstanding spokesman in this field. Stan was brought up in Prague, Czechoslovakia, where he received his training in medicine and psychology. Early in his schooling he was fascinated by the work of Sigmund Freud, which led him to apply to medical school. While he was enthused about the theoretical aspect of psychoanalysis, he became increasingly disappointed with its potential as a therapeutic tool. The meager clinical results did not justify the enormous investment of time, money, and energy. Just as he was having misgivings about his choice of careers, he volunteered for an experiment with LSD provided by Sandoz Corporation. The profound mystical experience that resulted completely changed his life, generating a vivid interest in non-ordinary states of consciousness that has been the guiding element of his life to this very day.

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With this new awakening, Stan became involved in the study of non-ordinary states of consciousness. Early on he became aware that what was being studied was not "experimental psychosis," as was so extensively accepted by other investigators in the psychedelic field, but the depth of the human psyche. He explored the properties and therapeutic potential of LSD and other psychedelics for a number of years in Prague. He continued this work in the United States at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore and the Research Unit of Spring Grove State Hospital in Catonsville, Maryland. At Spring Grove, controlled clinic studies of psychedelic therapy were conducted with a variety of subjects – neurotics, alcoholics, drug addicts, dying cancer patients, and mental health professionals. This was the last sanctioned work before the complete government shutdown of research and the passage of the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act of 1970, which essentially made all known psychedelics illegal to possess.

Stan retired to Esalen Institute in 1973 to work on two books based on his research. Among his publications are over 100 papers in professional journals and the books: *Realms of the Human Unconscious*; *The Human Encounter with Death* (with Joan Halifax); *LSD Psychotherapy*; *Beyond the Brain*; *The Adventure of Self-Discovery*; *The Holotropic Mind*; *Books of the Dead: The Manuals for Dying and Living*; *Beyond Death*; and *The Stormy Search for the Self* (the last two with Christina Grof).

The culmination of Stan Grof's research and observations is perhaps best presented in a recent paper in the *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, Volume 30, Number 4, October - December 1998, an issue devoted to the Therapeutic Use of Hallucinogens. Stan's paper is *Human Nature and the Nature of Reality*, pages 343-357. The following passages in quotes are taken from this article. In the Abstract, Stan states: "This research has generated a plethora of extraordinary observations that have undermined some of the most fundamental assumptions of modern psychiatry, psychology, and psychotherapy. Some of these new findings seriously challenge the most basic philosophical tenets of Western science concerning the relationship between matter, life, and consciousness."

For discussion, Stan raises a special group of non-ordinary states of consciousness which he has labeled holotropic, a term to designate "moving toward wholeness." It suggests states that are different from our ordinary state of consciousness in which "we are fragmented and identify with only a small fraction of who we really are." A principal characteristic of holotropic states is that other dimensions of existence can be experienced while still retaining touch with everyday reality. He describes a broad range of experiences that can occur, including frequently spiritual and mystical states. "We can experience sequences of psychological death and rebirth and a broad spectrum of transpersonal phenomena, such as feelings of union and identification with other people, nature, the universe, and God. We might uncover what seem to be memories from other incarnations, encounter powerful archetypal figures, communicate with discarnate beings, and visit numerous mythological landscapes. Our consciousness might separate from our body and retain its capacity to perceive both the immediate environment and remote locations."

While western psychiatrists are aware of the existence of holotropic experiences, because their perceptual framework is limited to postnatal biography and the Freudian individual unconscious, they have no adequate

explanation for them. Consequently "they see them as pathological products of the brain, symptomatic of a serious mental disease, psychosis."

Stan gives a thorough review of holotropic states and how they are induced. He covers ancient and aboriginal cultures and their techniques, such as "chanting, breathing, drumming, rhythmic dancing, fasting, social and sensory isolation, extreme physical pain, and other elements." Also mentioned are botanical materials containing psychedelic alkaloids, forms of spiritual practice such as meditation, concentration, and breathing exercises, and special techniques of the ancient mystery religions, perhaps employing psychedelic materials. More recently, active psychedelic materials have been isolated from plants and synthesized in the laboratory. New techniques have also been developed in forms of psychotherapy, such as hypnosis, primal therapy, rebirthing, and the system developed by Stan and his wife Christina, Holotropic Breathwork. Laboratory techniques for inducing holotropic states include sensory isolation and biofeedback. Such states can also occur spontaneously. "Since modern psychiatry does not differentiate between mystical or spiritual states and mental diseases, people experiencing these states are often labeled psychotic, are hospitalized, and receive routine suppressive psychopharmacological treatment."

"Ancient and preindustrial cultures have held holotropic states in high esteem, practiced them regularly in socially sanctioned contexts, and spent much time and energy developing safe and effective techniques for inducing them. These states... have been the main vehicle for their ritual and spiritual life." Since western psychiatry and psychology see such states as basically pathological, valuable information about the human psyche and healing is lost. Michael Harner is quoted as suggesting that Western psychiatry is seriously biased in at least two significant ways. The first is "ethnocentric, which means that it considers its own view of the human psyche and of reality to be the only correct one and superior to all those shared by other cultural groups," and the second is cognitocentric, "meaning that it takes into consideration only experiences and observations in the ordinary state of consciousness." (Harner, M. 1980. *The Way of the Shaman: A Guide to Power and Healing*. New York: Harper and Row.) The consequence is a disinterest in holotropic states by modern psychiatry, which has resulted in a tendency to pathologize all activities not understood in the narrow context of the monistic materialistic paradigm.

Stan continues in a detailed analysis of the changes that must be made in the cartography of the human psyche to take into account holotropic experiences. The two primary areas that need to be added to the usual biographical level are the perinatal domain, taking into account the trauma of biological birth, and the transpersonal domain, "which accounts for such phenomena as experiential identification with other people, animals, and plants, visions of archetypal and mythological beings and realms, ancestral racial and karmic experiences, and identification with the Universal Mind or the Void. These are experiences that have been described throughout the ages in religious, mystical, and occult literature." Both of these domains are expanded upon in detail in his paper.

With regard to the perinatal domain, Grof has observed detailed relationships between the experiences of subjects under psychedelics and stages of the birth process. These observations have been confirmed by data from Holotropic Breathwork. "Biological birth has three distinct stages... At each of these stages, the baby

experiences a specific and typical set of intense emotions and physical sensations. These experiences leave deep unconscious imprints in the psyche that later in life play an important role in the life of the individual. Reinforced by emotionally important experiences from infancy and childhood, the birth memories can shape perceptions of the world, profoundly influence everyday behavior, and contribute to the development of various emotional and psychosomatic disorders... In holotropic states, this unconscious material can surface and be fully experienced."

Stan examines each of these stages in **great detail, and reports** the kind of life developments that can ensue from these experiences. Such **experiences bring in** a wealth of important information affecting the development and growth of the **individual which remains** relatively untouched by conventional therapeutic techniques.

Such is also true of the Transpersonal level, **the level of experiences which transcend** the personal. Grof divides transpersonal experiences into **three large categories**. "The first of these involves primarily transcendence of the usual spatial barriers, or the limitations of the 'skin-encapsulated ego.'" Identification can be experienced with a vast array of possibilities, including other persons, animals, plants, and entire groups of people.

The second category involves transcendence of **temporal boundaries**. In the third category, consciousness can expand into realms and dimensions that the Western industrialized culture does not recognize as 'real.' This can include "numerous visions of archetypal beings and **mythological landscapes, encounters or even identifications with deities and demons of various cultures, and communication with discarnate beings, spirit guides, suprahuman entities, extraterrestrials, and inhabitants of parallel universes.**"

"In its farthest reaches, individual conscious can identify with Cosmic Consciousness or the Universal Mind known under many different names - Brahman, Buddha, the Cosmic Christ, Keter, Allah, the Tao, the Great Spirit, and many others. The ultimate of all experiences appears to be identification with the Supracosmic and Metacosmic Void, the mysterious and primordial emptiness and nothingness that is conscious of itself and is the ultimate cradle of all existence. It has no concrete content, yet it seems to contain all there is in a germinal and potential form." Again, the paper contains detailed descriptions and discussion of various aspects of such experiences, and how they relate to conventional understanding.

Stan makes telling arguments of how taking into account these **new dimensions of experience** can add great effectiveness to psychotherapy and self-understanding, understanding the role of spirituality in human life, and understanding the nature of reality. For those interested in these subjects, I highly recommend a detailed reading of this important data. Understanding of these issues **not only explains the importance** of psychedelic exploration, but can point the way to more effective healing, expanding personal development, and answers to many of the world's major problems.

Myron Stolaroff, Editor
